W. Lincoln was, I believe, a Dissenting Minister at Bury.

10.

A

SERMON,

Occasioned by the DEATH of the

Rev. Mr. JOHN GAWSELL,

PREACHED at the CHAPEL,

In Church-Gate-Street, BURY ST. EDMUNDS,

July 17, 1768.

By W. LINCOLN.

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TO

The CHURCH and CONGREGATION,

Of PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,

In ISLINGTON;

The FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,

As a TOKEN of CORDIAL RESPECT to them,

And a SMALL TRIBUTE to the MEMORY of

THEIR LATE WORTHY PASTOR and MINISTER,

IS MOST HUMBLY DEDICATED by

THEIR DEVOTED SERVANT in JESUS CHRIST.

W. LINCOLN.

A SERMON.

1. Thess. iv. 13, 14.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others, which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also, which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.

YOUR fathers where are they? and the Prophets do they live for ever? was the striking address of Zechariah to the people of Israel, and every succeeding age has concurred to shew the

mutability of human things. One generation passeth away, and another cometh in its stead, whilst every day is still compleating the first sentence denounced against apostate man, dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

The voice of providence, is still directing the ministers of religion to cry "all "flesh is grass; and all the goodliness "thereof, as the flower of the field, the "grass withereth, the flower fadeth, be-"cause the spirit of the Lord bloweth "upon it, surely the people is grass." The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever; and blessed be the name of our God, that we have a nobler dependance than can be fixed on the dearest earthly enjoyments; we have almighty power, unerring wisdom, and boundless goodness, to

trust

truſt in; whilſt the truth and faithfulneſs of God ſtand engaged to fulfill the rich promiſes of his Grace, to thoſe who hope in his mercy. It is this which fortifies the ſoul, in the moſt trying ſcenes; for the eternal God is our refuge, and underneath the everlaſting arms.

There is no grief in the long train of human calamities, which perhaps more deeply enters the heart, or more powerfully opens the tender ſprings of humanity, than when the deſire of our eyes, or the friend of our boſom, is taken away with a ſtroke. It is ſuch an affecting diſpenſation as this, which has occaſioned our preſent numerous aſſembly. Many of you my brethren were acquainted with the worth of our deceaſed friend—your grief will naturally be proportioned to your knowledge of

him. And as for myself who have been for some years happy in his intimate friendship, I confess to you that sorrow has filled my heart. But if I should give free scope to my affection as a friend, it would render me incapable of my present service as a preacher.

Almighty God, with whom do dwell the spirits of just men made perfect, convey divine comfort to our afflicted minds, and give us a patient and faithful resignation to thy will!

Our God, the God of all comfort, has not left himself without witnesses even in the most distressing scenes; in his holy word there are the most reviving consolations; and to whom can we or ought we to apply but unto him who hath the words of eternal life.

Let us endeavour this day, to draw water of divine refreſhment out of the wells of ſalvation. It is that glorious goſpel which brings life and immortality to light, whoſe efficacious power will heal our bleeding wounds and diſperſe the dark clouds of melancholy dejection.

I know of no paſſage more entirely adapted to this excellent purpoſe than that which I have now read to you. They are the words of an inſpired Apoſtle, and full of divine importance, let us open our ear to inſtruction, while he ſays, "but I would not have you to be igno-"rant brethren, concerning them which "are aſleep, that ye ſorrow not even as "others which have no hope; for if we "believe that Jeſus died and roſe again, "even ſo them alſo which ſleep in Jeſus

" will God bring with him." The evident design of which is, to comfort and support survivors, under the loss of deceased friends, and the general exhortation relates to the due moderation of their grief by which they ought to distinguish themselves from their heathen neighbours who were strangers to the hope of an happy immortality. This would be acting consistent with the sublime principles their of religion, and the glorious object of their faith. For if they believed that Christ died to expiate their sins, and rose again for their justification before God, they had the surest foundation to conclude, that them also, which sleep in Jesus, God would bring with the triumphant Saviour in the train of his magnificent retinue. It is in this connection that the Apostle pursues this most interesting subject to the end of the chapter.

"For this we ſay unto you by the word "of the Lord, that we which are alive "and remain unto the coming of the "Lord ſhall not prevent them which are "aſleep, for the Lord himſelf ſhall de-"ſcend from heaven with a ſhout; with "the voice of the Arch angels, and with "the trump of God, and the dead in "Chriſt ſhall riſe firſt. Then we which "are alive, and remain, ſhall be caught "up together with them in the clouds, to "meet the Lord in the air; and ſo "ſhall we ever be with the Lord." He might well add, wherefore comfort one another with theſe words, and what words can ſupply ſtronger conſolation! what ſingle deſire can be extended beyond this glorious iſſue of all Gods purpoſes of love, to his redeemed people!

I ſhall

I ſhall not enter into the queſtion, how far there might be ſome particular circumſtances or apprehenſions amongſt the primitive Chriſtians, which might lead the Apoſtle into this train of arguing: ſome indeed have been ready to urge, that it was a ſentiment generally prevailing among the Chriſtians of thoſe days; that the deſtruction of the Temple, and the coming of Chriſt to judgment, were events which would almoſt immediately ſucceed each other, grounded upon the manner in which, they had been ſpoken of by our Lord, particularly as recorded in *Matt.* 24. and *Mark* 13. where having foretold the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, under ſuch ſtrong figures as might very naturally be applied to the ſolemnities of the laſt judgement, ſays, this generation ſhall not paſs till all theſe things be fulfilled, and again in *Matt.* xvi. 27.

when

when our Lord had declared, For the ſon of man ſhall come in the glory of his father with his Angels, and then he ſhall reward every man according to his works, immediately adds, Verily I ſay unto you there be ſome ſtanding here, which ſhall not taſte of death, till they ſee the ſon of man coming in his kingdom; and once more, when Peter after Chriſt's reſurrection enquired of him concerning John, Lord, and what ſhall this man do? Jeſus ſaid unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? and we are expreſly told, then went this ſaying abroad among the brethren, that that diſciple ſhould not die. From ſuch circumſtances as theſe they might poſſibly conclude, that the final appearance of Chriſt, and the conſummation of all things was near at hand. Now in this view they were led to lament ſuch of their friends

as

as were removed by death, as being in ſome meaſure diſappointed of the glories of that illuſtrious day, when the faithful diſciples of Chriſt ſhould meet with diſtinguiſhed honours; and it is for this reaſon that he comforts them with an aſſurance, that the death of ſincere Chriſtians, ſhould be no diminution of their future glory? ſeeing, by the almighty power of God they ſhould be brought with Jeſus, as aſſeſſors in judgement; nay the dead in Chriſt were to riſe firſt, to grace the triumph of their glorious Lord. It does not appear at all unreaſonable to ſuppoſe that ſomething like this might be the caſe.

Neither will my time admit of my diſcuſſing that queſtion, whether St. Paul did not imagine that he himſelf, ſhould continue till his Lord's coming, which

ſome

ſome have inferred from the manner of his expreſſion, "For this *we* ſay unto you "by the word of the Lord, *that we* "*which are alive, and remain unto the* "*coming of the Lord*, ſhall not prevent "them which are aſleep." But it ſeems obvious that the Apoſtle here only ſpeaks of himſelf, as in the number of Chriſtians, though he might not be of the particular number of thoſe who ſhould be found alive at the Lord's coming. In any other view he would not be conſiſtent with himſelf, for it is in the ſecond Chap. of his ſecond epiſtle to the *Theſs.* that he expreſſly guards them againſt being deceived on this very head. Now we beſeech you brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not ſoon ſhaken in mind, or be troubled, neither,

ther by ſpirits, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of Chriſt is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: and if we attend to the other parts of his writings, we ſhall find that with reſpect to his own caſe, he was entirely ſubmiſſive to the will of God; he deſired that Chriſt might be magnified in his body, whether it was by life, or by death; and in his epiſtle to *Timothy* he expreſſly ſpeaks of his diſſolution by death, For, ſays he, I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. Now to ſuppoſe that the Apoſtle in the paſſage which ſtands connected with the Text, laboured under a miſtake which he afterward was able to correct, is not, I think, quite agreeable to our idea of a perſon who wrote under the immediate inſpiration of the Holy Ghoſt.

But

But I pass over these things as matters in which we have comparatively but little concern; the general design of the apostle is very evident, viz. to support and comfort survivors, under the death of pious friends; and that the present exercise may agree with this design, I would invite your attention to the manner in which the apostle speaks of departed saints—I will then lay before you the direction given to survivors, for the moderation of their sorrow, at the removal of pious christians from our world—and shall close with the noble and animating considerations urged to engage our acquiescence in, and patient submission to, the dispensation of divine providence in their departure hence.

I. Let me call your attention to the manner in which the apostle speaks of departed saints—But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep.

Under what a soothing image is the great enemy of our nature represented; the king of terrors here assumes a pleasing form, and we are insensibly reconciled to that, which, without the assistance of

divine revelation, we could not contemplate but with horror. Death to the true believer is to be considered as a ſtate of ſweet repoſe—The grave is that houſe appointed for all the living, where the wicked ceaſe from troubling, and the weary are at reſt — There the people of God find a covert, and ſhelter from all the ſtorms of life—They are beyond the reach of every enemy of their peace,—and can no longer be affected by any mortal change. In that ſafe repoſitory they ſhall continue, till the intereſting period arrive ſpoken of by the prophet Daniel— "when many of them that ſleep in the "duſt of the earth ſhall awake; ſome to "everlaſting life, and ſome to ſhame and "everlaſting contempt." — When the apoſtle ſays, I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are aſleep, he means not to ſatisfy them in every particular, into which a vain curioſity might prompt them to enquire, he only ſuggeſts ſuch truths as might be effectual for their preſent ſupport.—The particular ſtate and circumſtances of the dead, when the ſoul is ſeparated from the

body,

body, can amount to little more than plausible conjectures; it is a branch of knowledge evidently too high for us, and to be numbered amongst the secret things which belong to God alone—They are the things which are revealed, which properly belong to us, and our happiness consists in making a right improvement of them.

The word of revelation teacheth us, that when the body returns to the dust the spirit ascends unto God that gave it—But how, or in what manner the separate spirit exists, no wonder we should not be able to comprehend, seeing, with respect to our present state of being, it may truly be said of man, that he is a mystery to himself—'Tis sufficient for us to know, that death is not the end of our existence. To the righteous it is a sleep, out of which they shall certainly awake with renewed strength and in immortal vigour.

With respect to such as pass out of life in a state of estrangedness from God, and enmity against him, no comfort can be drawn from the dark and dreary mansions of the dead—Life renewed to them is but the

commencement of never ending misery—May this reflection penetrate our hearts, that we may be engaged to prepare for that solemn event, approaching upon the swift wings of time, which will mutably fix our state for eternity. Let us remember that the hour is coming, in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.

II. We are to consider the direction given to survivors for the moderation of their sorrow upon account of their deceased friends.

I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not as others which have no hope—God forbid we should! the exalted principles of our common christianity forbid it.—There is a sorrow after a godly sort, which the scriptures by no means condemn, for 'tis not the design of our religion to extirpate the affections of humanity, but only to reduce them within proper limits, and to regulate them by

a pious and unfeigned ſubmiſſion to the will of God. David was allowed to mourn over the death of his beloved friend and brother Jonathan, neither was he reproved of God for the tender and affectionate exclamations of paternal grief over his miſguided and rebellious ſon Abſalom.—That heart muſt be of the moſt obdurate kind which can be unimpreſſed or unaffected by the death of others, and peculiarly ſo of thoſe who have been knit to us by the tender bonds of nature or of friendſhip—The Lord ſaid indeed concerning the wicked Jehoiakim, they *ſhall not lament for him*; thus fixing, as it were, a curſe upon his abominable character—But with regard to ſuch as were amiable and excellent in their lives, and upon religious principles ſtood foremoſt in our eſteem, the benevolent affections will be expanded, and in ſpight of our utmoſt efforts to the contrary, nature itſelf will dictate what is right. Religion refines the paſſions, and whilſt we mourn the loſs of created good, brings them into a calm and ſweet ſubordination to the ſovereign will and pleaſure of our bene-

ficent Creator. — In this point the christian stands distinguished from the infidel —thus when the apostle exhorts not to sorrow, as others which have no hope, he plainly refers to the practice of the heathens, who upon the loss of their relations or friends, gave way to the most unbounded transports of grief, as might be expected from their unhappy state, who were described by the apostle as without hope—But we, brethren, have not so learned Christ— The great Sun of righteousness darts a thousand rays of comfort and peace through the darkest cloud, and it will be happy for us if in a trying time we are enabled to act in a manner consistent with what we profess to believe. Which leads me

III. To set before you the noble and animating considerations urged to engage our acquiescence in, and submission to the dispensations of Providence, in the removal of sincere christians by death; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

And

And am I now addreſſing myſelf to any who do not at leaſt profeſs to believe theſe fundamental truths relating to the death and reſurrection of Chriſt?—In the fullneſs of chriſtian charity, I hope I am not; though give me leave to obſerve, that there is a vaſt difference between a mere aſſent of the underſtanding to theſe things, and an experience of their divine power and influence upon the heart.

The apoſtle takes it for granted, that thoſe to whom he wrote were well eſtabliſhed in theſe important points of chriſtian doctrine; and it is upon this ſuppoſition that his whole argument is founded —and we ſhould do well to enquire into our own faith, not only concerning the fact itſelf, but the glorious purpoſes anſwered by the death of Chriſt; for it is upon this death that all our hopes of future happineſs are to be eſtabliſhed. Herein is he ſet forth as a propitiation for ſin; God is reconciled to us, the covenant of grace with his people is confirmed; his holy law is magnified and made honourable, and an everlaſting righteouſneſs brought in for ſuch as receive the Saviour

into their hearts by faith; and it is in completion of these great purposes that we can say as in the vth chapter of this epistle, ver. 9, 10. "for God hath not "appointed us to wrath, but to obtain "salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who "died for us, that whether we wake, or "sleep, we should live together with him.

Another necessary article to be believed, in order to our enjoying the christian hope and comfort, is that Christ rose again.

To believe with the heart that God hath raised Christ from the dead, is the great requirement in the methods of divine grace; for without this the whole scheme is incompleat — If God saw it fit that Christ should die for our offences, it was as necessary that he should rise again for our justification; for by this glorious fact he was proved to be the Son of God with power, it shews that his atonement is accepted, and that as Christ is risen from the dead, all true believers shall rise also.

Christ rose a triumphant conqueror over death, that ascending to the right hand of God, he might act as our advocate, and intercessor, and finally accom-

pliſh all the purpoſes of his grace in the eternal ſalvation of his redeemed people. This is what the apoſtle eſtabliſhes by a moſt beautiful chain of argument in 1 Cor. xv. from the 17th verſe, " and if " Chriſt be not raiſed, your faith is vain, " ye are yet in your ſins, then they alſo " which are fallen aſleep in Chriſt are " periſhed, (if in this life only we have " hope, we are of all men moſt miſerable) " but now is Chriſt riſen from the dead, " and become the firſt fruits of them that " ſlept."

And it is from a believing aſſent to theſe premiſes that the comfortable concluſion of the text follows; " even ſo alſo " them which ſleep in Jeſus will God " bring with him."

Bleſſed conſummation of the ſaints happineſs! By thoſe that ſleep in Jeſus we may underſtand thoſe who die in faith; and as the Almighty power of God was diſplayed in the reſurrection of their ſpiritual head, the ſame power will be manifeſted in collecting the ſcattered duſt of his people; they ſhall be joined in one glorious aſſembly; and attend their triumphant

phant Lord in the ſolemnities of that day, when he ſhall come to judge the world in righteouſneſs. It is in the moſt ſublime and ſtriking manner that the different Evangeliſts ſpeak of this ſolemn event, particularly in Matth. 25. "when the Son "of Man ſhall come in his glory, and all "the holy angels with him; then ſhall "he ſit upon the throne of his glory, and "before him ſhall be gathered all na-"tions, and he ſhall ſeparate them one "from another, as a ſhepherd divideth his "ſheep from the goats;" and from the acknowledged uncertainty of our Lord's coming to execute judgment, we are urged to be continually expecting it, and preparing for it in the exerciſe of ſobriety and watchfulneſs; not that this illuſtrious ſcene was to take place, as I before hinted, ſo ſoon after God's judgment upon the Jewiſh nation as ſome of the firſt diſciples might expect, but the intervening ſpace is ſometimes, as it were, loſt and ſwallowed up in the certain and lively view of this auguſt appearance. Thus St. John, when favoured with ſpecial revelations in the iſle called Patmos, cried, Behold

"Behold he cometh with clouds, and "every eye ſhall ſee him;" that will be an appearance of univerſal concern; God grant we may then lift up our heads with joy, in the view of our compleat redemption, for that day will irrevocably determine our eternal ſtate. Thoſe happy ſouls who ſhall be found faithful will then enter into their Maſter's joy, and ſo be ever with the Lord, to behold his glory, and in immortal ſtrains to celebrate the riches of his grace.

I hope there are many amongſt us who are no ſtrangers to the conſolations which ſuch thoughts, ſuch animating repreſentations ſuggeſt; let this reconcile our minds to the hand of Providence, which makes a ſeparation (but not an everlaſting one) between us and our dearest friends. I am certain there is many an aching heart which call for ſuch ſupporting conſiderations as theſe, I mean ſuch as were moſt intimately connected with that faithful ſervant of Jeſus Chriſt, the Rev. Mr. John Gawſell, whoſe death we now mourn. — It is with difficulty that I have perſuad[illegible] myſelf to enter upon his

character

character, (however usual upon such occasions) lest I should injure the man, whose memory will be ever dear to me—I knew something of his worth when living, and that makes me more sensible of my loss in his death -----I had always reason to esteem him for his many excellent and amiable qualities ---- God had greatly disposed his mind for spiritual attainments, and this was manifested in the uniform exercise of spiritual graces ---- He was a person of solid and sincere piety, of considerable literary attainments, and all crowned with the most unaffected humility. He was highly esteemed by those that knew him, even at a time when a forward boldness and an empty assurance, is too often preferred to those virtues which lie concealed under the veil of *modest merit*.

A congregation of protestant dissenters at Islington, for some years, enjoyed his useful labours, as a minister of the Gospel; but through too intense an application to his studies, his health was greatly impaired, and he proposed settling in this town, not with an intention of quitting the

the Miniſtry, but of preaching occaſionally, to ſuch congregations as might be vacant; in which capacity, had providence ſeen fit, to human appearance his uſefulneſs would have been very extenſive. But God has determined otherwiſe: having ſerved this generation according to the will of God, by means of a ſevere affliction he fell aſleep, and is now gone to give up an account of his ſtewardſhip. His laſt illneſs he bore with the utmoſt patience and reſignation, appeared very ſenſible that the time of his departure was at hand; whilſt his ſenſes continued he manifeſted the exerciſe of a lively faith in an all-ſufficient Saviour, as well knowing whom he believed, and that he was able to keep that which he committed to him to the day of his final appearance.

May a gracious God give to ſurvivors a ſanctified uſe of this preſent painful diſpenſation, may it animate each of us in our ſeveral ſtations, and relations in life, that we may be found followers of them who through faith and patience now inherit the promiſes.

I ſhall now cloſe with two reflections tho' they lie obvious to every view, 1. What

reaſon

reason have we to praise God for the christian hope, an hope which we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast; an hope, which connects heaven and earth, temporal with eternal things; an hope, which we shall one day have need of with respect to our own case, when we stand upon the verge of life ready to launch into the boundless ocean of eternity. The righteous hath hope in his death, its heavenly ray enlightens the gloomy vale, fills the soul with sacred pleasure, when human help fails, and terminates in the blissful enjoyment of God himself, in that world where his people shall be fixed as pillars in the temple of God to go no more out.

2. How truly deplorable is the case of such, as live without God in the world, and consequently without hope, at least such an hope as the Gospel authorizes. But consider this, ye that forget God, abuse his favours, and slight his grace, whoever hardened himself against him and prospered? that day which is pregnant with inconceivable joys to the true believer, will to you be a day of gloomi-

ness

neſs and thick darkneſs. No outward profeſſion of religion will then avail, if having the form of godlineſs, ye have denyed the power thereof, in the carnal frame and diſpoſition of your hearts, and the general tenour of your lives.

Let us (brethren) conſider what our hope will be when God taketh away our ſoul, or how we ſhall ſtand before him in the tremendous ſolemnities of the judgement day. The ſovereign judge will then be found to be no reſpecter of perſons. In the ſixth of the *Rev.* we read that the Kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, who on the day when the heavens ſhall depart as a ſcroll when it is rolled together, ſhould ſay to the mountains and the rocks fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that ſitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb, for the great day of his wrath is come, and who ſhall be able to ſtand. None can ſupport that day of awful viſitation, but ſuch as have been brought to the faith and knowledge of a crucified Saviour, who have imbibed his heavenly doctrine, humbly followed his example, and have reſted all

their

their hope of acceptance upon his meritorious death ---- "They ſhall be mine, "ſaith the Lord, in the day when I make "up my jewels, and I will ſpare them as "a man ſpareth his own ſon that ſerveth "him." Give me leave to conclude with recommending the diligent ſtudy and ſincere practice of the goſpel, as the one thing needful. May God enable us all to make the religion of the heart our firſt and great concernment, then we ſhall be ſafely conducted by the hand of divine Providence and grace, through this vale of tears, and finally join the general aſſembly of the church of the firſt born in heaven.

And may the giver of every good and perfect gift endue each of us with a living faith, enduring patience, and a well eſtabliſhed hope, to the glory of his great name, thro' Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

FINIS.